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WAKF ADMINISTRATION

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Nature of Wakfs. Much valuable property in Bahrain is wakf property, dedicated in the past for public and religious purposes, such as the upkeep of mosques, the payment of muezzins and priests, and in the case of the Shias, towards religious observances during the month of Muharram and the expenses of the matems, which can be described as village halls supported by religious endowments. In addition to the charitable wakfs, which are intended to benefit the general public, there are private wakfs which are frequently in the nature of entails of property to the heirs of a certain person and, among the Shias, property and money is often left in trust to pay for prayers to be said over a long period of time on behalf of a deceased person. Another common form of religious endowment is the dedication by will of one-third of the estate for charity or for certain specific charities, but this note only refers to wakfs of a public nature.

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Shaikh Khalaf. Until the year 1346 (July 1927—June 1928) all wakf property in Bahrain, both Sunni and Shia, was administered by the Qadis and by anybody who was sufficiently powerful to retain the administration of the property in his hands. It is not an exaggeration to state that most of the proceeds of the property found its way into the pockets of the administrators and was not distributed to the poor for whose benefit it was intended. In 1345 (1926-27), Shaikh Khalaf, who was then the Shia Qadi, was compelled to resign owing to agitation among the Baharna which was caused by his habit of taking bribes. Twice before during his long tenure of office he had been compelled to retire owing to irregular practices, but in spite of this he retained a great influence over many of the country villages. Shaikh Khalaf had been one of the leading personalities in Bahrain for many years, and it was partly owing to his support that the diving reforms were carried out in 1923. No Qadi since Shaikh Khalaf has had such influence over the Shia community as a whole.

Syed Adnan's Administration. His successor was Syed Adnan, a young man who had been educated in Iraq and who had a well-deserved reputation for piety, learning, and honesty. In addition to this, he was more progressive in his ideas than any of the previous Qadis. On his appointment he made an effort to register the wakf property and to start a regular system of administration. With the support of the Government he compelled many of the people who held wakf property to lease it through him and to submit to him an account of revenue and expenditure. He died very suddenly about a year after his appointment, but during the time that he was Shia Qadi he accomplished much valuable work, and his books containing the descriptions and registrations of wakf properties were of great use to the wakf department when it was formed.

Appointment of a Council. After the death of Syed Adnan, the wakf property was administered for some time by Shaikh Mohomed Ali Medani, the executor of the late Qadi, but this arrangement was distasteful to most of the Shia community who, quite rightly, placed no confidence in Shaikh Mohomed Ali Medani, who was afterwards convicted of misappropriating funds belonging to some minors and orphans. Two Qadis, Shaikh Ali bin Hassan of Sanabis and Shaikh Abdulla bin Mohomed Saleh of Manamah, were then appointed. The former, when he was appointed, stipulated that he should have nothing to do with the administration of the wakf property, the latter very soon demanded that the wakf property should be handed over to him. He was persuaded to appoint a committee of leading Shia notables to assist him in the administration of the property. After a short time the country people, who form the majority of the Shia community and who have the greatest interest in the wakfs, objected to this arrangement and made a petition on the subject to the Ruler, who had hitherto taken no interest in the question of the Shia wakf administration. The public asked that the administration of the property should be entirely in the hands of the people and not under the control of the Qadi of Manamah. A council was appointed, consisting of six men from the country and four from Manamah, and the wakf property was handed over to their charge. A local merchant was appointed as treasurer, but no president was chosen in order to placate the feelings of Shaikh Abdulla and Shaikh Mohomed Ali Medani, both of whom were comparatively satisfied so long as the other was not in control.